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TAGS: PGOV PREL PINR MX  
SUBJECT: POLLS SHOW PRI GAIN AS CANDIDATE SELECTION MOVES FORWARD

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Charles V. Barclay.  
Reason: 1.4 (b), (d).

**¶11.** (C) Summary. Recent polling suggests that the PRI's campaign tactics, combined with rather public internal PAN squabbles, may be gaining traction with voters, giving the party a boost as it seeks to build popular momentum in the run-up to the July elections. The PRI's candidate selection process has for thus far lacked the public controversy that has typified the PAN and PRD's effort, as the party has said it is trying to privilege winnability over crony favoritism in choosing electoral candidates. Nevertheless, political analysts and observers note that voters generally pay scant attention to the candidate selection period and may quickly forget the intra-party squabbling that attends it. A clearer and more certain electoral picture may only develop once the competitors' lists are finally drawn. End Summary

Polls Breaking Toward PRI

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**¶12.** (C) Several local observers -- analysts and politicos alike -- have confessed on different occasions their reluctance to put too much faith in Mexican polls released to the press. They've suggested candidates and elected officials are perfectly capable of buying polls that suit their specific political aims. That said, recent polling suggests that the Institutional Revolutionary Party's (PRI) campaign tactics, combined with highly public internal National Action Party (PAN) squabbles, may be gaining traction with voters, probably giving the party a boost as it seeks to build popular momentum in the run-up to the July elections. According to the first of six national polls taken by Berumen and Associates and paid for and released by local daily "El Universal," the PRI would sweep the legislative contests if they were held today with 39.9% of the vote--only points away from the 42% of the vote it would need to capture a majority in the 500 seat Chamber of Deputies. PRI's closest competitor was the PAN, which would walk away with 25.1%, while the Revolutionary Democratic Party (PRD) would be left with only 15.4% of the vote share. Additionally, the nationwide poll -- conducted between January 30 and February 2 with a 4.6% margin of error -- indicated that 33.6 of the 1,027 respondents "most identified with" the PRI, 24% with PAN, 13.5% with PRD, and 26.3% declared themselves independent. Notably, of the 10.6% of respondents who said they benefited from a government program, 41.6% said they would vote for the PRI, while only 21% chose PAN and 8.2% chose PRD. PRI appears to have made a

jump when compared to polling in early December that put the PAN and PRI in a virtual tie.

¶ 13. (C) Other recent polling does not necessarily reflect the same dramatic jump in support of the PRI, but does echo a favorable trend. In a January poll released by the generally respected firm Consulta Mitofsky, 33.3% of respondents said their electoral preference lies with the PRI, 25.8% with the PAN, and only 11.7% with the PRD. A separate poll released early this month by Buendia and Laredo gave PRI a three point lead over the PAN, which falls within the margin of error and suggests that the size and strength of the PRI's lead at this point is uncertain. Moreover, both the El Universal and the Consulta Mitofsky polls indicate a relatively high number of self-identified independents, who could swing either way in the July votes.

¶ 14. (C) The potential swing in favor of the PRI corresponds with what may be a decline in support for President Calderon's policies and greater pessimism toward Mexico's current and future economic and security climate. When asked in the El Universal poll, 65.9% of respondents said that the economic situation over the past six months has worsened some or a lot, while 74.6% said that the crime problem has increased during the same time period. 73.9% of respondents to the Consulta Mitofsky poll said that they expect the economic situation to worsen over the coming year, with 55.5% saying that the country is going in the wrong direction. Perhaps most tellingly, 65.5% of respondents indicated that they "disagree" with President Calderon, as compared to 59.9% in September. Despite PAN Senate President Gustavo Madero's rejection of the polling results, PAN leader German Martinez

called them a "call to attention" for the party, and PAN politicos have privately expressed similar concerns to PolCouns. The PRI also has picked up on these trends, sharply criticizing the President in recent days for the country's economic woes and releasing a 2009-2012 electoral platform that uses as a departure point Calderon and former President Fox's alleged failings.

#### Candidate Selection Smooth, Relatively Speaking

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¶ 15. (C) The PRI's candidate selection process has for the most part so far lacked the public controversy of the PAN and PRD's, and the party says it is trying to privilege winnability over crony favoritism when choosing its electoral candidates. PRI Senator Eloy Cantu told Poloff on February 11 that the party's national committee, headed by President Beatriz Paredes, has devolved selection authority to the state-level organizations in states headed by a PRI governor, giving the governor a liberal degree of autonomy in choosing candidates and avoiding national versus state party rivalries that have worried the PAN. The PRI's list of pre-candidates for the 300 directly elected federal deputy slots submitted to the Electoral Council includes only 57 districts with two or more election hopefuls, effectively eliminating in most areas the possibility of bitter and public inter-party rivalries during the pre-campaign period. Even in Campeche State -- in the hands of a PRI governor -- the party came to a negotiated solution when all five gubernatorial aspirants traveled to Mexico City to meet with party president Beatriz Paredes and quickly selected Senator Fernando Ortega as its unified candidate.

¶ 16. (C) Cantu noted that significant selection authority has also been devolved to the district level in states without PRI governors. While it will vary, in many districts the local party organization will choose the candidate through a body of delegates, who will look to polls, political background, and ties to the area -- rather than, perhaps, crony favorites -- to select the most electable politician to run in the July elections. Cantu said the delegates will also examine the pre-candidates carefully in order to unearth any hidden skeletons in their closet such as corruption. In cases where a primary is used, Cantu suggested that open primaries will be encouraged instead of closed votes, which

tend to engender corruption and leave pre-candidates vulnerable to narco-corruption as they look to buy support off of party militants. Cantu argued that an open primary, conversely, is more transparent.

Comment

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17. (C) PRI's apparent lead in polls and a relatively orderly candidate selection process certainly suggests that the party is gaining momentum. A focus on internal discipline and keeping internal rivalries under wraps puts the PRI in sharp contrast to, for example, the PAN and its far messier progress toward developing a candidate list. Nevertheless, political analysts and observers highlight the scant attention voters generally pay to the candidate selection period -- parties matter, but so do candidates. Moreover, while the PRI says they are privileging electability when choosing aspirants, most analysts say they have yet to see real evidence of a "new PRI" that has significantly moved beyond the same politics that has characterized the party for decades. The party's 2009-2012 election platform, for example, harkens back toward a nostalgic "PRI past" and focuses on such proposals as reviving government financing plans for agricultural workers -- a long-time PRI constituency -- and increasing government management of the economy. A clearer and more certain electoral picture may only develop once the competitors lists are finally drawn.

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